



May 29, 2012

Senate Energy and Technology Committee  
Lansing, Michigan 48912

Re: HB 4265 and HB 4266 – Yard Clipping Ban Repeal

Dear Senators:

The Michigan Environmental Council was established in 1980 and is a coalition of environmental, public health and faith-based groups from across Michigan. We have worked in a variety of areas including waste disposal and energy policy since our inception. We strongly urge your opposition to these bills.

**Yard clippings are not trash.** When properly handled, yard clippings are good for the environment. That has not changed. Grass clippings, when allowed to return to the lawn instead of being collected, lead to a healthier lawn that needs less watering. Yard clippings when combined and composted creates a soil enhancement that can benefit farms, gardens, and green spaces. The bills undermine educational efforts of the last twenty years on the value of mulching mowers, composting and soil enrichment.

**People are going to lose their job** - Of critical importance these days is the loss of jobs that will occur due to these bills. These bills will lead to some composting companies going bankrupt, people losing their jobs, and significant losses by those who have financed expensive composting machinery. The money that these companies spend on machinery, maintenance, trucking and running their businesses will disappear from our economy. This will lead to a reduction in tax revenues for the state.

**These bills will result in more landfills in our communities.** Landfills are a risk to drinking water, can be a nuisance and lower property values of nearby homes. Landfill gases are a source of toxic air pollutants. Yard clippings represent between 12-20% of all municipal solid waste.

**Because landfills are not welcome in most communities, the solid waste industry is and should remain a "regulated" industry.** Landfills under state law can force the siting of a new landfill in a community if insufficient capacity exists, usually over the significant objections of neighboring properties. We ban the disposal of a number of items into landfills including scrap tires, beverage containers, batteries and medical waste. Some of these items are banned for health reasons, other to encourage recycling

and preserve landfill space. Landfills owners state that composting operators should need to "compete" for the yard clippings. Landfills that run composting operations compete today for contracts to pick up yard clippings. What these bills would do is make composting compete against the less desirable use of "landfilling" yard clippings.

**The added electricity production is not worth it** - There has also been some misinformation on the amount of energy that will be generated. Michigan currently only has about 125 megawatts (MW) of landfill gas capacity. Proponent's studies show that adding yard clippings to landfills only increase the production by about 10%. Therefore, adding yard clippings only increases landfill gas energy production by approximate 12 MW (compared to 20,000 MW overall). Even with increases in the number of landfills installing collection systems, Michigan's total potential is likely less than 20 MW. This small amount is not worth the loss of economic activity that the composting industry has brought into our communities.

**Lastly, including yard waste in landfills would have a net impact of increasing greenhouse gases into our atmosphere.** This is because the breakdown of yard clippings in the low-oxygen landfill setting creates methane instead of carbon dioxide. Methane is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (23 times more). This fact, coupled with the relatively low gas collection rate of landfills, leads to a net increase in greenhouse gases even assuming the overly optimistic capture rate included in the bills. The overall projected increase in renewable energy annually is made meaningless by the increase in greenhouse gases.

**More greenhouse gases, more landfills and more unemployed workers make these bills bad policy for the State of Michigan.** Instead Michigan should be exploring policies that would make us a clean energy leader around the country. We urge members to oppose HBs 4265 and 4266.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Clift', written over a horizontal line.

James Clift, Policy Director